

## **Foundation of All Good Qualities**

**Seventh teaching**

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**Dhargyey Buddhist Centre**

### **The Rarity of Human Life**

As you know we have been doing this teaching on Foundation of All Good Qualities and the context that we left off the teaching was precious human life, how difficult it is to find. The point being dealt with is just that: how difficult human life is [to find]. Geshe-la just read, it says:

*When asked what kind of causes are needed for obtaining or finding this rare precious life, it says to achieve this, causes are difficult to fulfil. First of all, such a life must be based on pure ethical conduct. A second cause for this kind of rebirth is that pure ethics must be complimented by practices of the six perfections and so on.*

*Thirdly, a person wishing to find this must make constant pure prayers to obtaining this kind of life. Given the number of people who fulfil these three causes is so small, causally speaking human life is very difficult to find.*

A life of pure ethics must be complimented by the practice of six perfections: generosity, ethics itself, patience, joyous effort or enthusiastic perseverance, concentration and the last one is wisdom. Pure ethics must be assisted by the practice of these six.

### **Categories of phenomena**

Since there is a mention of the six perfections, I thought to myself let me briefly talk about them. First of all, Geshe-la cited a stanza, which talks about the need to practice generosity, saying that however affluent one may be, one can't keep holding onto your riches, one can't take them to the next life. Why? They are inescapably impermanent, perishable, soon to be lost.

Things that exist can be subsumed under two categories: they are permanent or impermanent. Material resources, wealth, riches, they fall under impermanent category. What are some of the synonyms of impermanence? In Tibetan epistemology, impermanent is one; second is functional phenomena; next one is produced, causally produced phenomena; and then compounded phenomena, things that come into being through being compounded; next one is substantial phenomena; and the last one is specifically characterised phenomena. These are some of the many synonyms of impermanence.

These terms are synonyms. In Buddhist epistemology these are synonyms because if an existent is a functional reality, it pervades [means] that it is impermanent. If it is impermanent, similarly it is necessarily a functional reality. Likewise you could say if a thing is a compounded phenomenon, it is necessarily a produced phenomenon. There is mutual inclusion of the terms. In other words, they mean one and the same thing. If something is impermanent, it is necessarily produced; if it is produced, it is necessarily impermanent as they mean the same thing. Although it might sound slightly confusing, but please bear with us. It is really useful to understand these basic terms.

It is also said that things are either existent or non-existent. Something either exists, or it doesn't exist at all. If it is existent, it is synonymous with: existent; knowable phenomena, things that can be known; object of comprehension, if something is there although it might be difficult, it could be known in time,

everything could be understood; object; phenomena. These are terms which have the same meaning, they all mean they exist.

### **Knowable objects**

The word 'knowable object' is at the apex, this is the apex of the umbrella and it has many spokes. Knowable object or phenomena covers everything. Knowable objects include both permanent and impermanent – it includes all the other terms: existents, objects and so on.

The term knowable phenomena includes both permanent and impermanent. Now if you ask, "are knowable phenomena permanent or impermanent?" it includes both permanent things and impermanent things like the two subsets. If you ask is 'knowable' permanent or impermanent, Geshe-la says the knowable phenomena is permanent. It includes both, it has both, but itself is permanent.

Why is it that, since knowable objects include permanent and impermanent things, why is it that by itself it is only permanent not impermanent? Why?

It is permanent because some of the 'givens' in Buddhism. The first given is, if 'x' could be both permanent and impermanent, it has to be permanent. Similarly, if 'x' is existent or non-existent, it is existent.

Some of the examples of permanent things are like space, like the empty space in this room. Is there empty space in this room? Is empty space in the room existent? Is there empty space in this hall? Does it exist?

The vacuous space in the room is there. This vacuity, this empty space in the room, the empty nature of the space doesn't change like the clock changes, like we undergo subatomic change. The empty space, does it change or not?

This space in the room is permanent. Why? It is a phenomena isn't it? It is a phenomenon that is not mutually inclusive with momentary change. This empty space in the room, it is permanent. Why? Because it is a phenomena, it is there and it doesn't undergo momentary change.

**Audience:** But if I put a piece of paper in the air, the space has changed.

**Geshe-la:** You think this space has disappeared? Space has not changed. A book, phenomena, has come in its place. Space itself cannot change.

**Audience:** But it's moved.

**Geshe-la:** The book has moved and taken its place. The space itself cannot be moved, it doesn't change. The definition of space is a phenomena that is not mutually inclusive, is not the same as, with momentary change. Momentary change is the definition of impermanence.

Is space permanent? Yes, as it obeys the law of the given. If something is either permanent or impermanent, permanence dominates. If something is existent or non-existent, it is existent. Existence dominates. The empty space in the room. Is there empty space? Yes. For example, this is a red colour and now the book has occupied the size of space equal to the size of the book. If you now let the sun shine on the book, what will happen to the book? It will discolour, the sunrays will make it pale. But does the sunray, however much it shines in empty space, does the colouration of space change?

**Audience:** You can see light rays coming through the space.

**Geshe-la:** That's light. That is phenomena, that is impermanent phenomena. Functional phenomena can occupy space, space is very accommodating. With the light that comes in the space, it doesn't remain, it moves with the source. Things that function in space, things that invade and grasp space may change, but the space itself which accommodates phenomena within that space doesn't change.

**Audience:** Is there space in the book?

**Geshe-la:** Does the book have space? Is there space in the book? Yes. If there is no space, you cannot have the pages turning. Although there is no big gap, between each sheet of thin paper there is an equal width of space overlapping. Space is compressed by the number of pages.

Of course, when you see the mountain and the trees, you think that they have no space. The mountain is quite solid. But when you look into matter with a very sharp microscope, they say that at a very subtle level there is space, even in smaller things. Doesn't science say that matter is hollow?

**Audience:** Is even the concept of a book impermanent?

**Geshe-la:** The concept is also impermanent. The eye consciousness which sees the book, the book that is the knowable phenomena, both the subject and object are impermanent.

**Audience:** With quantum physics, every cell is 99.9% space, all the concept of what we have as solid is actually completely skewed. So that's how the Qi Gong masters do healing. They find a block and they focus on the space and help rearrange things. I thought that might be a helpful comment...

**Geshe-la:** Indeed, we are made of the four elements and we are made of a composite of particles of the four elements and all of these elements are impermanent. At this moment what we need to remember is the word, that knowables or knowable phenomena pervades [includes] both permanent and impermanent - but itself is permanent.

The point that I want to make is a knowable phenomenon by itself is permanent. Therefore it doesn't change. Whereas functional realities, which are subsumed by knowable phenomena, are impermanent because as functional phenomena they undergo momentary change.

Here when basic debate is taught, then somebody comes up with this counter-pervasion argument. First knowable phenomena include permanent and impermanent. Then somebody says, *"Given that knowable phenomena include both permanent and impermanent, the question is can you eat knowable phenomenon?"* Knowable phenomena includes both permanent and impermanent. But knowable is permanent. Then somebody says if that is the case, can you eat knowable phenomena?

Somebody says, *"Yes you can, as you can eat bread. Bread is a knowable phenomenon!"*

It may be confusing sometimes, but it really sharpens makes your mind more incisive to really see things, to see the divisions, the relationships and when somebody comes up with this kind of thing...

**Audience:** You can eat some knowable phenomena.

**Geshe-la:** knowable phenomena include both permanent and impermanent things. But, knowable phenomena, *she-ja*, knowables are themselves permanent. Why? Because of the two basic givens! If it is either permanent or impermanent, it has to be permanent. If it is existent or non-existent it has to be existent. So then, given that *she-ja* can have both permanent and impermanent and by itself is permanent, now is bread permanent? But bread is *she-ja*, *she-ja* is supposed to be permanent. It includes permanent and impermanent. So can we eat bread?

**Audience:** Yes we can eat bread.

**Geshe-la:** The fact that bread can be eaten will not affect the basic nature of permanence. For example, humans in the world are said to be humans with average lifespan of 100 years, it's one of the things said of us in the scriptures. We have moved from the golden age to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, so we are going down in terms of time-scale. In time, when our world collapses the space which is occupied by the planet earth and people who inhabit the world, when this planet disintegrates then people and all life-forms will migrate to other planets, other world systems. There will be nothing but empty space in place of the planet, and in the space within the planet there will be nothing but space.

This world according to Buddhist description of evolution and the dissolution of world systems, this world is destroyed elementally, by the elemental forces of fire, earth, water and wind. The force of either one of these elements, when the time comes, will completely destroy everything and the earth will be gone. What is left in its place? Space. Space which was occupied by earth in this lifetime regains its... so space does not change. Things within space may change.

Again, evolution of life will continue. After the complete destruction of the planet, there will be total vacuity in the area occupied by the earth. So space will last for considerable length of time. But in time another world system will come to be formed within the same space; initially there will be the wind element – air, atmosphere comes to be formed – and then water then earth and so on. Again, a new life system and planet will take up the empty space.

The reality is our life, this body is a knowable phenomenon and between permanent and impermanent it is impermanent. Because it is impermanent it has finite existence. When this body perishes, but the mind within the body will move on. So our mind, which exits the dead body will move on to take on another life form. So what life form it will take depends not on its wishes or its whims, it's completely determined by the force of karma or the prevailing wind of the karma. Due to positive prevailing wind behind the mind, our mind in this lifetime has taken a human body. This human body lends itself so impeccably to spiritual development and therefore the instruction, *"Make haste."*

Again back to functional things, functional things are impermanent. Why? Because they undergo incessant change, evolutionary change, momentarily. How much has one changed since one's birth? Though we are doing nothing, but we are still undergoing change. It's really good to understand the notion of impermanence. If you think carefully what impermanence means then there is a big difference between Geshe-la today and Geshe-la yesterday. When we are non-analytical, when we are on a casual level, Geshe-la today is exactly the same as Geshe-la yesterday. But when you think carefully, yesterday's Geshe-la is not here anymore, there is a new Geshe-la.

**Losang:** Welcome Geshe-la!

**Geshe-la:** All this tangent came because I wanted to talk about life, our life which is very precious, priceless, yet easily lost. Talking of causes which go to accomplish this kind of life, I wanted to talk about six perfections. Then all of a sudden I ended up talking about the things I talked about!

However I have to say it's really good to have some of the basic terms under our belt, synonyms and mutually inclusive or exclusive relationship between things. This kind of incisive critical analysis really helps us think for ourselves. When we have this kind of analytical thinking, we won't be credulous. When someone says everything is permanent, *"Oh wow everything must be permanent as he's such a great lama..."* We don't take things on face value and we begin to question, *"How could everything be permanent or impermanent?"* So one begins to have confidence to critique.

When we develop our critical analysis or critical thinking, then it really helps us to approach a task, a problem in creative way and approaching it from all kinds of angles, although whichever angle you follow may give the same result, but the ease and efficiency with which the outcome could be achieved would be quite different.

**Audience:** I understand how space isn't affected by impermanent things changing within it, but I still don't understand how you can say 'no' to 'can you eat bread?'

**Geshe-la:** It's really good that you have got this qualm about the bread being edible, that's exactly what happens at the monastic training. When they teach debate, there could be a group of 50 students, one teacher going through Buddhist epistemology and the teacher would raise question and then the teacher doesn't say it is this or it is that. The teacher raises an issue and approaches it from different angles and doesn't give the answer. People in the beginning become quite confused but they're quite concerned about it and they go back and study themselves, as well as debate.

For example I come from Sera monastery. Like all other monasteries we have debate sessions and a debate session starts sometime in the late evening and then a group of forty, fifty even hundred monks gather and somebody would be answering. He could be attacked by so many monks and then the debate goes well into midnight. Different people have different interpretations of what the guru said at the teaching and they need to nut it out through debate. If the guru were to say everything is black and white, they would take it as gospel and have nothing to talk about. So they leave things deliberately, usefully opaque.

They leave it, pedagogically speaking, opaque so it's good for students to think about themselves in the courtyard. Then your incisive intelligence will grow. So I'm sorry, everything went off from impermanence.